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Councillor Seán Woodward  
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Our ref: TO2019/22396/MP

OFFICE OF THE  
EXECUTIVE LEADER

14 November 2019

18 NOV 2019

Dear Councillor Woodward,

Thank you for your letter of 25 October to the Secretary of State requesting that Defra commissions an Environment Agency review of Waste Water Treatment Works permit levels assigned within the Partnership for South Hampshire catchment area. In the absence of the Minister responsible for this policy area, I am replying on her behalf.

Permit reviews are required to check whether permit conditions continue to reflect appropriate standards and remain adequate considering experience and new knowledge. The Environment Agency is required to review permit conditions in the light of new information on environmental effects, best available techniques or other relevant issues.

Natural England is currently reviewing and synthesising the evidence regarding the condition of protected habitats in the Solent. It is doing this as a matter of urgency and anticipates this evidence will be submitted to the Environment Agency in the next few weeks.

The Environment Agency will consider the need to review relevant permits in view of this evidence. Any such review may determine if permits for Waste Water Treatment Works require limits for substances where none are currently required, and/or lead to a tightening of existing permit conditions. For a complex area like the Solent catchment and its harbours, this is likely to be a considerable undertaking which may include new modelling. Given the Waste Water Treatment Works contribute only a small proportion (approximately 10%) of the nitrate sources that contribute to the problem of nitrate pollution in the Solent and its Harbours compared to other sources, any permit review may not in itself resolve the pollution issues development proposals are currently facing.

In response to stakeholder concerns, I understand that the Environment Agency and Natural England are finalising a joint position statement to clarify their respective roles under the planning and permitting regimes. This will be shared with relevant stakeholders imminently. Defra group officials, working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, remain committed to working with the Partnership for South Hampshire to support local authorities to help them find short- and long-term solutions to address the nitrogen pollution issue, enhance the environment and enable housing delivery.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact the Secretary of State about this important issue.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Plowright  
Ministerial Contact Unit